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SUBJECT: BIO, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES: TRAN VAN HUONG-MAI THO TRUYEN

REF: SAIGON 76, SAIGON 154

1. HUONG IS AN ELDERLY SOUTHERN CONFUCIANIST WHO SERVED AS PREMIER FROM NOVEMBER 1964 TO JANUARY 1965; MAI THO TRUYEN, HUONG'S RUNNING MATE, IS A RETIRED CIVIL SERVANT AND LAY BUDDHIST LEADER WHO IS PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTHERN BUDDHIST STUDIES ASSOCIATION.

2. HUONG WAS BORN IN VINH LONG PROVINCE, IN THE MEKONG DELTA, IN 1903. HE ATTENDED HANOI TEACHERS COLLEGE, THEN TAUGHT SCHOOL IN MY THO FROM 1926 TO 1937. HE WAS PRIMARY EDUCATION INSPECTOR IN TAY NINH PROVINCE FROM 1937 TO 1945. IN 1945 HE BRIEFLY JOINED THE VIET MINH AND LED AN ANTI-FRENCH GUERRILLA FORCE NEAR SAIGON. BY 1946 HE HAD BECOME DISILLUSIONED AND QUIT THE VIET MINH. HE OPERATED A PHARMACY IN SAIGON UNTIL 1954. IN THAT YEAR HE WAS NAMED SAIGON PREFECT BY DIEM, BUT HE RESIGNED IN 1955 BECAUSE HE HAD NOT BEEN GIVEN ENOUGH BACKING TO PUT DOWN THE GANGSTER BINH XUYEN SOCIETY. FROM 1956 TO 1960 HE WAS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE VIET-NAM RED CROSS.

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3. IN APRIL 1960 HUONG WAS ONE OF THE SIGNERS OF THE CARAVELLE PETITION WHICH CALLED FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORMS IN THE DIEM REGIME. AFTER THE ATTEMPTED COUP OF NOVEMBER 1960, HE WAS PICKED UP BY THE POLICE AND IMPRISONED UNTIL APRIL 1961, WHEN HE BEGAN TO WORK WITH THE VIETNAMESE DENTAL ASSOCIATION. HE WAS ALSO ARRESTED BRIEFLY FOR OPPOSITIONIST ACTIVITIES IN 1962.

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4. AFTER THE NOVEMBER 1963 COUP, HUONG WAS NAMED TO THE COUNCIL OF NOTABLES AND ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF ITS POLITICAL COMMITTEE. IN SEPTEMBER 1964 HE WAS REAPPOINTED SAIGON PREFECT, AND IN NOVEMBER 1964 HE WAS NAMED PREMIER.

5. AS PREMIER, HUONG SHOWED CONSIDERABLE COURAGE AND DETERMINATION IN OPPOSING BOTH MILITARY AND BUDDHIST INTERVENTION IN POLITICS. HE WAS REMOVED AS PREMIER JANUARY 1965, AFTER MORE THAN A MONTH OF SEVERE POLITICAL TURBULENCE SPARKED BY THE BUDDHISTS AND AGGRAVATED BY DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ARMY. AFTER THAT TIME HE MOVED TO VUNG TAU AND HAS ENGAGED IN NO OVERT POLITICAL ACTIVITY, ALTHOUGH HE APPARENTLY HAD SOME ROLE IN THE FORMATION OF THE SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE MOVEMENT, A SOUTHERN-ORIENTED POLITICAL GROUP WHICH HAD SEVEN MEMBERS ELECTED TO THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY IN SEPTEMBER 1966.

6. TRUYEN WAS BORN OF PEASANT PARENTS IN 1903 AND ENTERED THE FRENCH CIVIL SERVICE IN 1928. HIS DISTINGUISHED CAREER AS AN ADMINISTRATOR CONCLUDED IN 1960 AFTER FIVE YEARS AS INSPECTOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS IN THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY.

7. TRUYEN WAS PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES IN 1956 AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF VIETNAMESE BUDDHISTS IN 1959. HE COOPERATED WITH THICH TRI QUANG AND THICH TAM CHAU IN THE BUDDHIST STRUGGLE OF 1963 WHICH PRECEDED THE FALL OF THE DIEM REGIME, BUT HE GRADUALLY BECAME SEPARATED FROM TRI QUANG AND TAM CHAU BECAUSE OF PERSONAL AND PERHAPS REGIONAL RIVALRIES, AND BECAUSE HE OBJECTED TO POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY MONKS. IN 1964 HE FOUNDED THE NON-POLITICAL SOUTHERN BUDDHIST STUDIES ASSOCIATION WITH HEADQUARTERS IN SAIGON. HE HAS REMAINED ALOOF FROM RECENT BUDDHIST STRUGGLES WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND AMONG THEMSELVES, INDICATING THAT HE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN TAKING PART IN A REORGANIZATION OF BUDDHISM IF IT WERE KEPT OUT OF POLITICS.

8. BOTH TRUYEN AND HUONG HAVE MANY OF THE POLITICAL VIRTURES OF TRADITIONAL VIETNAMESE LEADERSHIP--AGE AND EXPERIENCE, PERSONAL INTEGRITY, AND UNSELFISHNESS. THE ISSUES ON WHICH THEY WILL CAMPAIGN HAVE NOT BEEN CLEARLY SPELLED OUT, BUT IN HIS JUNE 12 STATEMENT HUONG SAID THAT "ALL PROBLEMS REVOLVE AROUND THE PRESENT WAR, A WAR WHICH WILL HAVE TO END,

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AND END BY NEGOTIATIONS." HE INDICATED THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS SHOULD BE BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH VIET-NAM, AND THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO QUESTION OF ONE SIDE WINNING AND THE OTHER LOSING.

9. HUONG AND TRUYEN MAY ALSO STRESS THE ISSUE OF WHAT THEY REGARD AS THE DETERIORATION OF MORAL FIBER OF VIETNAMESE SOCIETY, THE PREVALENCE OF CORRUPTION, AND THE NEED FOR SWEEPING REFORMS. HE MAY ALSO TALK ABOUT INFLATION AND RELATED ECONOMIC PROBLEMS.

10. HUONG HAS SAID HE WILL RUN WITHOUT IDENTIFYING HIMSELF WITH ANY PARTICULAR POLITICAL PARTY OR SECT. HUONG HAS A CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION WHICH CLAIMS CHAPTERS IN THIRTY PROVINCES AND IS AT ITS STRONGEST IN THE SOUTH.
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